

City of Lynn

City Hall, Room 306
Lynn, MA 01901



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Jared C. Nicholson
Mayor

Mayor Nicholson's State of the City Address (2023)

Thank you, Council President Walsh. Good evening Councilors, School Committee members, Legislators, Mayor McGee, Auditor DiZoglio, and guests.

This is my first State of the City address and I so appreciate you all being here.

Gracias a todos por estar aquí.

I want to especially thank my wife Katherine, my sons Henry and Benjamin, and my parents.

I'd also like to invite all of you to check out the North Shore Juneteenth event in the lobby after this honoring Black excellence in our community.

I want to give a special thank you to everyone who stepped in to help the residents who were displaced by the cold this weekend:

- Lynn Fire Department
- Lynn Police
- Lynn Housing Authority
- Cataldo Ambulance
- Public Health
- ISD
- Custodians
- LPS
- City Council
- City Solicitor
- Library
- Red Cross
- Salvation Army
- Concerned Citizens and North Shore Chabad
- Lynn Shelter Association

I'm glad that the timing of this speech allows me to publicly thank you for stepping up without hesitation to help our residents in need.

Now for the state of the city.

The state of our city is strong.

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The future of our city is bright.

Both of those statements are true because of the strength of our people.

They're true even in the face of the many challenges we face.

They are true because we are 14 square miles teeming with determination to overcome those challenges.

Every day when I walk into my office, I see more than 50 flags representing countries of origin of students in the Lynn Public Schools. I'm reminded that there are people here from all over the world counting their blessings that they overcame so much to finally make it here. And they are counting on us to be there for them as new challenges await.

From Red Rock on Lynn Shore Drive beating back the Atlantic to the expanse of forest reaching for the skies in Lynn Woods, we are fortified by nature to address those challenges.

Foremost among those is making sure this city feels like the precious gem that it is for all of us, regardless of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, origin, or creed.

Housing

We took a meaningful step forward in the effort to make the City work for all of us with the City Council to adopt inclusionary zoning for the City, setting aside homes in new developments that Lynn residents can afford.

We doubled down on that effort by creating and funding an Affordable Housing Trust Fund to reach even further in addressing the need.

We have projects in motion that we will continue to push, from veterans housing at the Lynn Armory, to senior housing at the former Marshall Middle School site and the former Union Hospital site, to the conversion of an out-of-date rooming house into suitable living arrangements at the Hennessey House in our downtown.

And while we create all these opportunities for new housing that's affordable, we won't forget the need to address the old housing stock and needs of our existing residents. We will fund

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improvements, help protect renters, and fight the scourge of unsafe and substandard living conditions.

The need to address our cost of living is clear and we have acquired the means to do so. 2023 will require the diligence, focus, determination, and collaboration necessary for implementation.

Jobs

The best long-term strategy to help people afford the cost of living is to help people find good-paying jobs.

We are enveloped by one of the most dynamic job-creating ecosystems in the world in Greater Boston's innovation economy. We're working hard to plug Lynn into that growth.

Our zoning overhaul last year helped prime several key sites for commercial and industrial growth. We've made inroads in the life sciences development community with our developer tour and platinum readiness designation from that industry.

We're keeping the momentum going with a major event March 8th with our Northeastern University partner BioConnects New England – a coalition seeking to open life sciences growth to populations historically excluded from the industry. This summit will connect dozens of local leaders with biotechnology companies to discuss next steps.

All of this planning and recruitment is exciting. But we need to be clear-eyed in our expectations that major investments take time and are subject to the fluctuations of whatever industry is growing (or not growing as the case may be).

That's why in all of this work, we can't just think about what properties might take off. We have to focus on our own people. If we're successful with workforce development, our residents benefit no matter when the investment finally comes to Lynn, because those jobs already exist in the region. Not to mention that our large and ambitious workforce is a big part of what will attract employers when the investment is ready.

Last year around this time, we submitted a grant application to do a workforce development plan. That plan has convened government, business, education, and labor leaders and is expected to be finished later this year. The group has already identified priority industries: manufacturing, construction, education, health care, life sciences, technology and clean energy.

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Once we have the plan, we then have to implement the recommendations. This all takes time. But I want to point out that as a City, we are showing that we not only can write good plans, we can actually make them come to fruition. That's a testament to our ability to work together: The Council, City personnel, community partners. It took a couple years to write the Housing Production Plan, and it took a full year for us to be ready to implement inclusionary zoning. But we did it. That gives me real optimism that we can keep coalescing around good ideas that will help our residents and actually implement them by working collaboratively.

We're also working to make sure that the major growth that is happening in Lynn is a win for everyone: future inhabitants of the site, the City, the developer, the neighborhood, and the workers doing the construction. Start from the premise that we are a city that supports workers. Our streamlined development process includes a review by the chair of the wage theft committee to proactively help ensure observance of workers' rights.

Schools

Any conversation that we have about our future is based on our schools. I want to thank Dr. Tutwiler for his service to Lynn and now the Commonwealth as well as Superintendent Ruggiero for leading us this year. I also want to welcome our next superintendent, Dr. Evonne Alvarez. This City can't wait to work with you.

If you know our schools, you know that great work happens in facilities that are lacking. Lacking space, lacking educational components, lacking needed capital investments.

We're going to continue our full-court press to address this.

The Lynn Public Schools has had a lot of success reducing elementary class sizes, down to the low 20s. That has been the result of a lot of hard work and sacrifice by our educators. We recognize that and that's why we're working on a facilities master plan for the elementary level.

What we have learned so far is that if every elementary school had the educational spaces you would expect, we would need additional classroom space for more than 600 students. In other words, as it is we're short by the equivalent of an entire elementary school.

We have lots of work to do at the secondary level as well, and we are making progress. We've opened the Frederick Douglass Collegiate Academy on North Shore Community College's

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campus, a pioneering approach to giving LPS students the college experience at no cost to them and building on one of the most successful early college programs in the state.

We're adding modular classrooms at every level.

We hope to add a new Pickering Middle School by 2026.

But really tackling this issue will require help from the state to reform how school construction is financed. We are working hard on driving that issue on Beacon Hill with the leadership of our state delegation and in the months to come will need all of your help to support them in this work.

Another area of growth in 2023 will be Pre-K. Some of the work we are doing to find space is going to create much-needed Pre-K classrooms. We are also thinking about our Pre-K approach in general.

Only 1 in 4 Lynn children is enrolled in a Pre-K program. Statewide, almost two-thirds of children are enrolled. This is a glaring disparity that surely affects our students' learning trajectory and one that we want to take on.

If we are going to be successful, we'll need to partner across sectors: public schools, private schools, nonprofit agencies, home-based centers. Through the Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative, Lynn Public Schools has been successful in getting a grant to open another four pre-K classrooms with a nonprofit partner, Gregg House. We're going to continue to be creative and aggressive in finding space, supporting quality across the board, and emphasizing inclusion, particularly for pre-K students with disabilities.

Infrastructure

Mapping out the future requires a plan for how all of this should come together. That plan needs to be developed with community input at every step. That's the goal for Vision Lynn, the City's comprehensive plan, which should be ready this summer.

Vision Lynn has already identified three vision statements:

- 1) Lynn will be a city where people feel safe and comfortable to live, work, learn, and play;

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- 2) Lynn will be a city where all community members have the housing, transportation access, social connections, and educational or economic opportunities to live a fulfilling life; and
- 3) Lynn will be a city to be proud of, with strong, diverse, and connected communities that take care of our shared spaces, natural resources, and each other.

Vision Lynn will help us grow thoughtfully. Growth needs to help us solve problems, not create additional ones. So, we need to be deliberate about traffic. That's why we're investing hundreds of thousands of dollars to improve traffic signals, addressing the impact of increased traffic to cannabis stores with the City's cannabis funds, including dangerous intersections such as South and Summer, along Western Ave and Chestnut Street, and more.

We're also addressing traffic by redoing major roadways with state and federal funds, from Blossom Street to Lynnfield Street, including major arteries like Western Ave and Essex Street. We're tracking more than \$100 million dollars of state and federal funds to fix our roads.

We're using \$16 million of ARPA funds to overhaul major parks throughout the city to give people suitable places to stay healthy in mind and body. We'll be seeking community input on design ideas for Kiley, Keaney, Lynn Woods, Gallagher, Breed and McManus Field in the coming weeks. That will complement other parks projects in progress, such as the planned waterfront park on the Lynnway, the pickleball courts at Clark Park, and the coming rehabilitation of the fountain on Lynn Commons.

Some parks will be redone. All of them will be cleaner. We bought more than 30 compacting trash bins to help the DPW and residents help us keep those parks clean.

Our equipment fleet is being upgraded as well:

- new heavy trucks for DPW
- new engines and pumpers for the Fire Department
- new cruisers for the Police, and
- a new van for Public Health.

These are smart fiscal investments to support the essential services that the City provides.

Our state delegation is pushing for transit infrastructure, and we are closer than we have been in years to the ferry getting re-established.

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We have created a plan to clean up King's Beach, working with a coalition of stakeholders in the region and across different levels of government and sectors and we're now working on identifying ways to fund it.

We are tackling projects to address climate change. We realize that our position on the water is both a blessing and a challenge to deal with rising sea levels and flooding, which we are doing through mitigation projects like the one at Barry Park. We also know that our City's infrastructure must keep pace with the need for change, which is why we are working with the state to bring electric vehicle charging stations to Lynn.

These projects take time and we want to keep residents informed. A digital infrastructure project that will come to fruition this year will help us do that – a new City website that will do justice to the importance of our work and our residents and businesses' ability to access it.

Peace

Our hopes for the future depend on Lynn being a place where people feel safe and like they belong. That is not a given, it's something we have to work for.

We have taken major strides in creating an independent, unarmed crisis response team, an idea put forward by the Lynn Racial Justice Coalition, to address mental health needs in the City and systemic racism. We should be ready to launch an initial version of this new team later this year. Our partnership with Eliot will allow us to launch a truly pioneering effort that we'll push to hold accountable to our goals of racial justice and cultural competency.

We continue to support the recovery community and tackle the opioid crisis. Our Opioid Working Group, which we are soon launching, will help direct our efforts in allocating state funds we've received to support that work.

Every day and night, the Lynn Police Department is out working to keep us safe, from fentanyl, from illegal guns, from any number of threats. They are also working to build connections in the community through programs like the Safe and Successful Youth Initiative and the Central Business District bike unit and their own skillset and capabilities through trainings and partnerships, such as the Behavioral Health Intervention Program. The LPD has successfully hired a new analyst through a grant that will help us track and plan how that work is going in the coming year.

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Our safety is also the mission of the Lynn Fire Department. The new year coincided with a new leader there, and I'm very grateful for Chief Archer's many years of distinguished service and am excited to work with Chief Sullivan and the whole Lynn Fire Department on their next chapter of keeping us safe.

A feeling of belonging requires being seen and heard. That's one of the reasons why language access is so important to our Administration. We are thrilled to welcome a new language access coordinator, who will be guiding us through the hard but necessary transition to City Hall becoming a building that serves a truly multilingual society.

The initiatives I have highlighted tonight represent an ambitious agenda for positive change. For it to actually improve the lives of our residents, the change needs to be lasting, it needs to be sustainable. That's why it's so important that we uphold our commitment to fiscal discipline throughout this work.

I also want to recognize that providing excellent services to our residents is paramount in all of this work. I'm here because the people elected me to do a job. Every resident has needs that they rely on the City for. We need to deliver in those moments to fulfill our obligations, recognize when we fall short, and think about how to do better. That's truly a team effort from everyone who works for the City, and I'm so grateful for all that you do every day.

You may know that I wrestled in high school and college. As Council President Walsh can attest because he stopped by last summer, I still wrestle at my annual beach wrestling tournament. Nothing marks the passing of time like the additional time it takes for me to recover from that event each year.

Being mayor can sometimes feel like one of the most challenging parts of wrestling – it's just you out there. Like when I'm up here at this podium, there's no one else coming to save me. But one of the things that I love about wrestling, is that while it might look like you're by yourself out there, your team is really out there with you. They're the ones who pushed you all week to prepare, who pick you up after the match, who drive you to be the best you can be.

We have a great team in the City of Lynn. My staff in the Mayor's Office, everyone that works for the City, who serves on our boards and commissions, my fellow elected officials, really anyone who cares about this community and our future together.

Thank you for a strong and successful first year together. Let's have another one in 2023.

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